

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006160

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: THE VIEW FROM THE HEARTLAND, PART TWO

REF: ANKARA 6060

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Public support for the AK government is solid in the conservative central Anatolian provinces of Konya and Karaman. If the AK government takes the lead, the local public, although wary, appears willing to go along with sending Turkish troops to Iraq. Government officials and residents support EU reforms, notably without nationalistic resentment about the imposition of outside standards. Meanwhile, reform has not come to the sclerotic central bureaucracy that controls most government services. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Konya and Karaman are conservative provinces with agricultural bases and growing industry. Konya has a reputation as a center of more religiously-oriented political thinking. Residents and state officials are sensitive about Konya's religious image and are quick to claim that "this is not Qom." Konya is home to Selcuk University, whose 70,000 students make it Turkey's second-largest university and give the provincial center a more cosmopolitan air than the rest of the region. AK dominated the region in November's parliamentary elections, taking 14 of 16 seats in Konya and 2 of 3 in Karaman. However, a mix of parties have filled municipalities since the last local elections in 1999, including the left of center CHP, right-wing MHP, and Islamist SP.

Solid Support for AK Government

¶3. (C) Public support for the AK government is solid in Konya and Karaman. Even opposition party mayors agreed that the AK government is popular with the local public. Konya Chamber of Commerce leaders claimed that according to a private poll they conducted, local support for AK had increased 5% since the November elections. Residents, government officials and opposition party members credited the AK with continued effective grassroots political work in cities, unlike previous parties who only focused on contact with the public as elections neared. Small farmers expressed satisfaction that since November the AK government had not increased the price of their most expensive input, diesel fuel for tractors.

¶4. (C) There is widespread local optimism about the AK government, partially because it came to power without a coalition, unlike recent governments, and is perceived as potentially more effective. But optimism is also buoyed by a sense that the November elections wiped the slate clean of old, discredited parties and opened a new political chapter. Konya Chamber of Commerce leaders said people had confidence in AK "because it started from scratch." Karaman provincial AK leaders, most of whom were under 40, claimed they had not been involved in politics previously but that AK had given them a reason to become involved. A retired police officer in the town of Ayranci, in Karaman province, compared the AK government to a new building: "The old building collapsed," he said, "now a new one is going up."

Wary Support for Troops to Iraq -- If the Government Leads

¶5. (C) The Konya and Karaman publics appear wary but ready to support Turkey sending troops to Iraq -- if the AK government leads. However, locals expressed a mix of uncertainty about U.S. intentions in Iraq, fear of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, and desire for U.S. action on PKK/KADEK in Iraq. A Konya attorney predicted the local public would support the AK government's position on troops, but added "the U.S. must declare its intentions." Karaman AK leaders predicted the same in their city, also saying the U.S. needed to clarify its intentions. Even Yesildere's very partisan CHP mayor said that the local public would follow the AK government's lead on the troop question "if U.S.

support for the Kurds is withdrawn." Karaman's AK Chairman chided the U.S. for inaction on KADEK -- and was unaware the U.S. had already declared it a terrorist organization.

#### Positive on the EU

**16.** (C) Konya and Karaman officials and residents expressed positive views on Turkey's EU reforms. Security directors said they welcomed EU-related reforms to the criminal justice system, which they asserted were being implemented. Security directors in Konya and Karaman claimed they were applying to judges for search warrants when they had not done so previously. Konya's chief public prosecutor said Turkey needed to continue to keep up with the EU in the area of criminal law. Owners of a local Konya TV station predicted EU membership would bring expanded freedom of expression. Librarians in the town of Eregli (Karaman province) saw EU membership as holding out the prospect of expanded freedom of thought.

**17.** (C) Amid the support for reforms, there was no expression of nationalistic resentment over pressure from reforms coming from the outside. The only hint came from Eregli's right-wing MHP deputy mayor, who declared Turkey was making too many concessions to the EU. He furnished no examples, and hastily added that he was not opposed to Turkey's EU membership but was simply saying reforms should be in Turkey's interest.

#### The Sclerotic Central Bureaucracy

**18.** (C) One area that has not seen reform is Turkey's sclerotic central government bureaucracy, which controls most government services but appears only sporadically effective. Offices of centrally-appointed state governors, who command most resources, were filled with officials, but few citizens, in contrast to the offices of elected mayors and local political parties. In the provincial capital of Aksaray, north of Karaman, a group of residents praised the governor, but none knew his name or any projects he had completed (they all knew the mayor). The central bureaucracy does appear to work sporadically, especially writ small. The sub-governor of Ayranci (pop. 3200), his outer office filled with citizens, said local residents even contacted him for help when their cars broke down. The village headman of tiny Uc Bas (pop. 70) said the governor's office was responsive to requests at monthly meetings with village headmen.

**19.** (C) But when it comes to getting things done, the state system is more a hindrance than a help to most residents. Small merchants in Konya said they took their problems to the mayor's office, not the governor. Konya Chamber of Commerce leaders emphasized their economic independence from the state but worried that the "unwieldy structure" of the state economic bureaucracy would nevertheless "cast a shadow" over their businesses. Owners of a Konya TV station recalled that the governor brushed off public demands to increase the number of stores selling required school uniforms, relenting when their station ran a series of feature stories on the subject.

**110.** (C) The system is frustrating even to those who work within it. The sub-governor of Eregli in Karaman province described Turkey as "one of only two communist states left", the other being North Korea. He blamed the Turkish bureaucracy for stifling dairy exports from his town's factories. The state, he said, required "200 signatures in order to export" and no factory was brave enough to initiate the time-consuming process. The sub-governor added with disgust that he had to ask Ankara for permission even to replace a broken window in a schoolhouse. Ayranci's sub-governor, who used to work in the private sector, expressed disappointment at the lack of initiative in the state system. He said that he would like his office to work longer hours, but could not require employees to do so. Eregli's state-appointed librarians, who receive books from Ankara instead of selecting their own, complained they had to request Ankara's permission in order to accept donated books.

**111.** (C) Comment: It is noteworthy that AK is not resting on its laurels even in natural strongholds like Konya and Karaman, although the party is avoiding getting out front on sending troops to Iraq. In contrast, EU reforms appear to enjoy genuine official and grassroots support. End Comment.